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GET THE MOST FROM YOUR

OATS



If you grow oats, it makes sense to shoot for top returns. Each year many Illinois farmers harvest more than 100 bushels of oats per acre. They may also put up 70 to 80 bales of straw per acre and follow with stubble grazing in the fall. While doing all of these things, they also establish alfalfa seedings. Here are some pointers drawn from agronomy research and farmer experience that may help you get returns like these from your oats.

Plant early

Oats are a cool-weather crop. Illinois is a little south of the best climate for this crop, so early planting is a must for top yields. Plant as soon as you can get the land ready. Tests in several states show that you'll lose roughly 1 bushel per acre for every day you delay seeding your oats.

Prepare a good seedbed

Plowing is best. Once over with a disk won't bury heavy cornstalks. But if plowing is not practical, you'll get better oat yields if you shred the stalks and disk the ground well.

Fertilize

Too often oats get only the "leftovers." They have to live on plant food left by the corn crop or by soybeans.

Nitrogen. Nitrogen can often boost your returns from oats. New varieties have stiffer straw, stand better, and respond more to nitrogen than older varieties.

If you're farming timber soil and have put little manure on the field, you should get a profitable yield "kick" from 40 to 60 pounds of nitrogen. Try up to 80 pounds if you aren't making a forage seeding. But if you're on prairie soil and have grown lots of legumes in your rotation and have put manure on the field regularly in the past, then nitrogen may not pay.

If you've had troubles with oats lodging in the past few years, steer clear of nitrogen. But if your oats haven't lodged, you can push up your yield with nitrogen.

Phosphorus. Phosphorus helps oats get off to a fast start in the spring while the soil is still too cool for quick release of phosphorus. Apply a soluble form because oats need phosphorus in a hurry, and soluble forms are more readily available than rock phosphate. Don't forget your legume seeding. It may need both phosphorus and potassium.

To find how much of these nutrients you need, there's no substitute for a soil test. Your county extension farm adviser can tell you how to take your samples and where to have your soil tested. He can also give you information to help you select the best fertilizer rates to apply.

Select a top variety

In northern Illinois, Shield, Garland, and Brave have made top yield records for the past several years. Newton and Clintland 60 have also done well.

Here are three-year average yields on the DeKalb and Urbana experiment fields:

	<i>DeKalb</i>	<i>Urbana</i>
Brave	112	92
Garland	112	92
Shield	118	88
Clintland 60	106	81
Goodfield	101	79
Newton	109	86

If you have lodging problems, a stiff-strawed variety like Goodfield may be your choice. In central Illinois, Brave, Garland, Shield, and Newton are top yielders, while Clintland 60 also does well. Farther south, best choices are Newton and Brave. Two newcomers also show promise. Clintland 64 has better rust resistance than Clintland 60 while Tippecanoe is short and stiff-strawed and may outyield Goodfield.



Buy good seed

Seed from farm grain bins often contains weed seeds or germinates poorly. If you use your own seed, be sure to clean well and check germination before planting. For best results buy certified seed — your best guarantee that you'll get what you pay for. And buy from a reputable seed dealer, one who takes pride in the quality of his seed, not in its low price.



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Plant treated seed

Chemical seed treatments kill smuts and other diseases carried on the seed and protect the seed germinating in the soil. Tests show that you'll get better stands from treated seed. Plant pathologists report that treated oats average up to 3 more bushels of grain per acre than untreated oats. Recent smut outbreaks suggest that seed treatment may pay off in future years even more than in the past.

In most areas of Illinois your seed dealer or elevator will treat your seed for a nominal charge. Or you can buy chemicals for treating your oats in your own drill box.

Use a drill

Illinois tests show that you'll get 7 to 10 bushels extra for drilling instead of broadcasting oats. If your acreage is small, it may not pay you to buy a drill. But if your acreage is large or if you plan to grow oats for years, it will pay you to buy, borrow, or rent a drill at oat-planting time.





Consider other uses for oats

You may also be able to increase your returns from oats by harvesting them for forage. Last year Illinois agronomists harvested more than 12 tons per acre of oat silage, cut just at heading stage. This silage produced almost twice as much TDN (total digestible nutrients) per acre as oats from nearby plots that were harvested for grain. With the oats cut this early, the alfalfa seeding produced a hay cutting in September. Best of all, alfalfa stands were better where the oats were cut for forage than where left for grain.

Chances are that you can increase your returns from oats. But, like other crops, oats need a complete program. High fertility won't pay on late-planted oats. Neither will it pay on an outdated variety. On the other hand, the best varieties can't show their merit if fertility is lacking or if seed quality is poor. Many Illinois farmers are putting the pieces together for a profitable oat-growing program. How about you?

Authors: W. D. Pardee, extension specialist in forage crops, and C. M. Brown, associate professor of plant breeding.

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